

COMMONWEAL

August 11, 1967

CLEMENCY

The horrors of Vietnam, the scars of the Middle East war, the news of poison gas employed in Yemen, the anonymous victims of tyranny and misery throughout the world make us pause before we would condemn the international kidnapping, the irregular trial, the dubious extradition process, and the threatened execution of Moise

Tshombe. Why Tshombe? The African leader has been willing to exploit the Congo's troubles for personal gain; he was not known for mercy towards *his* political adversaries; and many Africans believe that the death of Patrice Lumumba rests on Tshombe's shoulders.

Why Tshombe? The question should be widened. Why anyone? Why protest the treatment of Régis Debray, the young French Castroite intellectual, awaiting trial and possibly execution in Bolivia? Why protest the mysterious removal of South Korean students from West Germany and their sudden return to Korea? Why center concern on this or that individual when so many are suffering? And why play favorites? Some intellectuals seem to specialize in protesting Communist miscarriages of justice, some do sentry-duty only over the West. The Pope intercedes on behalf of Debray (who comes from a distinguished Catholic family). Cardinal Spellman intercedes for Tshombe.

The answers to such questions can only be found in that network of human relationships which links the destinies of all men. We must begin somewhere—or everywhere. What happened to Tshombe, as his lawyer has pointed out, could happen to Svetlana Alliluyeva. His treatment, like the use of gas in Yemen, is another crack in the feeble structure of international procedures.

The United States has asked clemency for Tshombe. The request should be honored, although it is difficult to see how either Algeria's Boumediene or the Congo's Mobutu can extricate themselves from the course of events. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this disturbing intrigue is the possibility that the U.S.'s plea for mercy may be pure hypocrisy. There is considerable evidence that the C.I.A., which has backed Mobutu with men and advice for over five years, authored the entire operation. Maybe pleas for clemency should be directed to Washington. ✓